

Dénouement

a poetry anthology



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Dénouement

a poetry anthology

Beliveau Books

STRATFORD

Dénouement: a poetry anthology

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Foreword

Dénouement (Fr.)

noun: the final part of a play, movie, or narrative in which the strands of the plot are drawn together and matters are explained or resolved.

Beliveau Books of Stratford, Ontario is pleased to present this digital anthology of poetry that deals with finality, coda, and epilogue, within the context of our place upon this planet. Poems that acknowledge what has come before us, the drama of struggling to survive in the 2020s, and a look to possible futures whether the outcomes may be positive, negative, or stasis in nature.

A variety of interpretations were welcome in our call for submissions: ecological, sociological, political, as well as interactions in personal relationships as experienced by the writer. What lies ahead for the reader on the pages that follow are episodes from each contributor that intersect with inevitable loss and a corporeal or transcendent death.

This volume, though, isn't locked in morbidity, as occasionally a hopeful beam may be left in tragedy's wake. As in life itself, its finding speaks louder than we are able to hear.

Yours, in poetry,

Andreas Gripp

Editor, *Dénouement*

February 2, 2021



Andreas Gripp



Andreas Gripp

Kenneth Pobo

Stories That End With “The End”

Sometimes I like the finality of
an ending that says this is it. Now
go and do your laundry. I rarely

believe it—the next page may be blank,
some climax may be resolved,
but the end? Today I’m thinking
about my dahlia tubers
which winter wants to destroy
unless I dig them up and take them in,
blossoms finished,

spring a little bell ringing
in a hall closet. I can’t hear it yet,
but years of new springs assure me
that it is. My own death, my end,

I hear that too. The sun must
hear its own even billions of years away.
When darkness stirs my tiny particles,
what energy will make use of me?

So Quick

You're playing the *Canned Wheat* album
by the Guess Who and thinking that today
will be a moon split, cherry on top.

The phone rings. Someone's dead.
You may be playing statue maker forever,
lost to a painful pose—or become

a swatch of cotton
stuck on a door, no one
to pull out the staple.

Night Is Over, Isn't It?

You drop
lit paper
into the oil
stove

I watch
and hear

fire
spread

like the sun
coming
up at night
and kicking off

her yellow
shoes

Laurinda Lind

As They Bombed Appalachia

Up, up they came from deep inside,
miners with sooty sandwiches
and lungs, out of labyrinths they

made mountains take, maps like
brain folds in their minds where
they had stored against

collapse, where they collected
themselves while they still could.
When the bombing began and blew

holes in the horizon they filed
for unemployment and worker's
comp while they sipped the slurry

water that now sang through their
taps, and watched the afterlife
roll toward them ridge by ridge.

Backtracks

Winter wracked the trestles
of the Carthage & Adirondack,
the iron soul of the North.
While farmers slept, the night horse
smashed drifts, slew sheep,
feathered nests with creosote.

How should we feel to know that this god too
was tamed, that the dense old hills
wait wary as an open book,
that the terrible magic lies translated
and dozes on its rusted track—
but the old ones remember the ore cars

that chanted in the icy woods
and, years before ours, wondered
whose souls went flying
toward the light, what northern
son of thunder scattered stars
before his unrepentant heart.

Howie Good

Honey in the Rock

There are only ten of us
and there are ten million
fighting somewhere of you,
so get your onions up
and we will throw up the truce flag.

*

Yes, I will lie quiet.
Can't do another thing.
I am all through.
I don't want to holler.
Police, mamma, Helen,
turn your back to me, please.
I will settle the indictment.
Come on, open the soap buckets.
Talk to the sword.
The chimney sweeps.

*

Pardon me,
I forgot I am plaintiff
and not defendant.
I take all events into consideration.
The glove will fit what I say.

*

Did you hear me? I would hear it,
the Circuit Court would hear it,
and the Supreme Court might hear it.
I am sore and I am going up
and I am going to give you honey if I can.

*(Remix of the last words of American mobster Dutch Shultz, 1903-1935,
as quoted at <https://web.archive.org/web/20070607184913> and
<https://www.feastofhateandfear.com/archives/dutch.html>)*

How's Things?

It felt as though I was under anesthesia. I couldn't find words. One morning I couldn't even recall "toothbrush," but said, "You know, the thing that makes your teeth clean." Later that week, a mural of "everyday heroes"—a nurse, a firefighter, a police officer—appeared overnight on the wall of an abandoned factory. The painting was so clumsily executed they looked like they were engaging in cunnilingus. I don't know who could have done it. Anybody. That is what caused the trouble. Police were looking all over. Kindly take my shoes off. There is a what-you-call-it (handcuffs?) on them.

A Joke Is a Just Joke (Except When It Isn't)

I kept seeing the oddest things out of the corner of my eye—Nazi salutes, flying saucers, a fallen power line jitter-bugging on the road. Oh, no big deal, I tried to tell myself. The truth is, it was confusing and a little scary. Turning up Main, I saw cops in battlefield gear spaced along the street. They were clicking the safeties on their machine guns on and off while inspecting the passers-by. One officer had stopped a student for questioning. “Why are noses broken on Egyptian statues?” I heard him ask. It was funny, but I didn’t laugh.

Teacher

That is exactly
what one needs—
someone to say
you are good
at something.

I would stare
at the back
of people's heads
on the bus
for years afterwards
with so much gratitude.

Bruce McRae

Don't Push Your Luck

Standing into danger, is the nautical term.
A drunken surgeon cutting close to the nerve.
Speed demons racing the lights in the rain.
A sword swallower succumbing to the gag reflex.
It's a difficult world out there.

Which is why I like to sit here quietly,
my back straight, hands folded in contemplation,
head slightly bowed, as if a penitent at prayer,
and with nothing to declare but my indifference.
I'm telling you, sugar wouldn't melt in my mouth.

Incommunicado

My true love calls from a fold in the earth,
her voice a lengthening shadow,
her voice a high cloud in winter.
My true love calls from an airliner's berth.
From an inconvenient crag on a Hollywood back lot.
From a fault under the ocean.

My heart is a chalk outline of a body.
My heart is an immigrant's untold struggle,
her one true voice mispronouncing my name,
sounding like a bell ringing in a baby-blue sky,
my beloved's voice shining like a new penny.
Like a match struck in a mausoleum.

Carrie Lee Connel

Meniere's Disease

The famous suffer as I suffer:
Van Gogh sliced cartilage and flesh,
sending the conch to a lover
so she could hear his torment.
Its alias falls off the tongue in clear notes:
Tin-ni-tus.
How do I hear the silence on the other side?
A constant, ever-present companion
keeps sleep at odds with sanity;
banishes contentment to a far-away world.
But what if this condition that drives the mind
to desperate acts—needles bursting ear drums—
is not the devil's chatter
but the voice of God, misinterpreted?

An Expected Journey

When Stephen Colbert asked what
he thought happens to us when we die,
Keanu Reeves said,
*The people who love us
will miss us very much.*

An expected journey
in an undiscovered country.

You thought yourself a sage, said:
Words written on your soul are my philosophy.
But *I am ready* are the words written there.
A glass of wine, a tab of Xanax
bring me a step closer.
But the wine is weak and the tablet broken.
There are twenty-nine more in the bottle;
and the sixteen I hid away months ago.

Do not speak ill of the dead.
But why? The deeds of the living
already haunt childhood nightmares.

I don't believe that you will miss me;
I don't miss you now.
It's easier this way.

A Vision of Fiammetta (1878)

sit here, my dear; no, rise
we must have you standing
I know it shall be tedious
take as a lesson
on how to treat your own models
I prognosticate, that under Madox Brown
your production may surpass
the meagerness of my own
do not feel he is your master loaning you out
for others to experience your charms
your upbringing raises you above them
forget the ones that came before
you are singular and I paint you thus
a flame amongst these apple blossoms
petals cascade like tears
I paint the *Morpho menelaus*
for Maria, Christina and William
I will hide one more in the lowest corner
Mother says the cardinal
is a loved one come to visit
but I have seen a messenger of death before
did you ever meet my wife?

I give you the angel to adorn your hair
and a heart cabochon at your hip
the shape repeated in filigree on your wrist

The Darwinian Survivalists

We are blind to the sacred
as it exists in Nature
and our blue/green home
suffers for our hubris.
When the four horsemen of progress
blasted roughly over
the air-cleansing trees,
brimstone hooves shod in white-hot shoes,
they spiked the tracks and pitted the earth;
the farrier's art now losing out
to modern inventions
of more humane treatment
(finally, some good news).

The mother of invention
calls us to save
 the bees
 the elms
 the whales
 the polar bears
for the last black rhino is already gone.

Future preserves will house the humans;
the remainder of the world
returned to nature
to replenish and restore the balance;

illegal then to venture
outside the walls,
to kill a single butterfly,
destroying some future
not yet perceived.

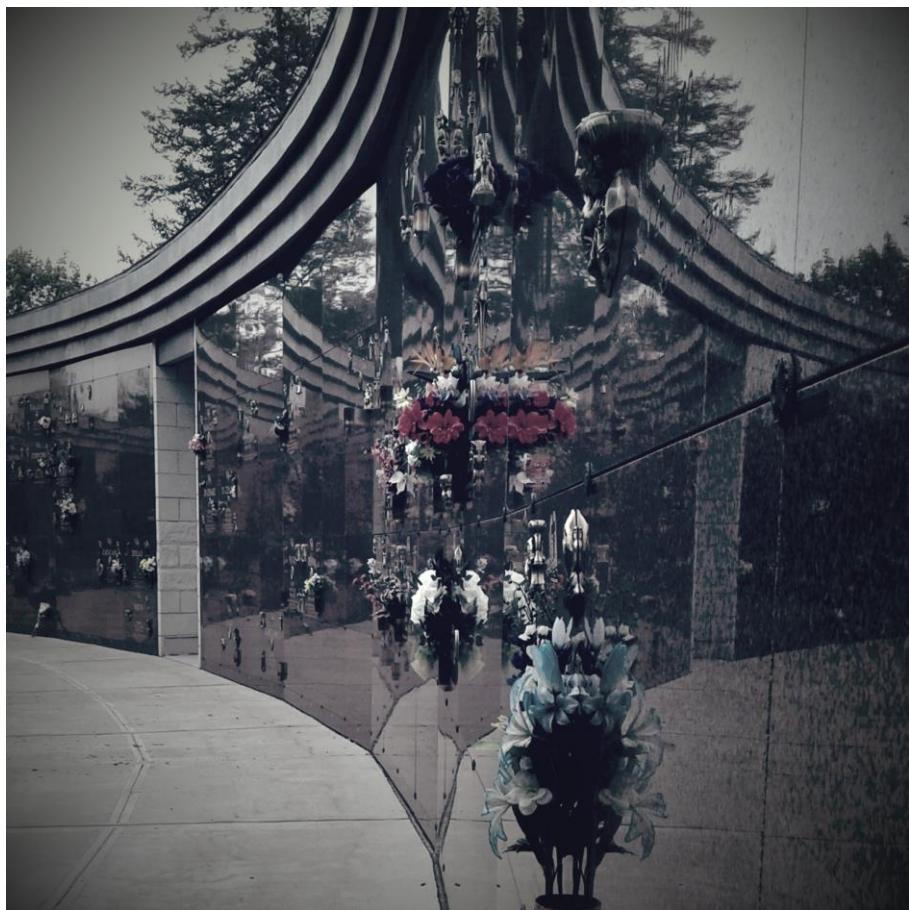
The Darwinian survivalists
became the annihilators
and the poetical legislators
threw up their hands.

Inheritance

A pyre is lit with the ember of a dying fire—
a bleak mid-winter cliché.

If Emily Dickinson met Christina Rossetti—
both born December 1830—
in the night sky roiling with aurora borealis,
would their souls, dove and crow,
meld into the half-mourning grey
of the coming dawn,
or repel, an explosion
of silver-thread embroidery
across a crisp taffeta sky?

I imagine a whirlwind of wingbeats
as they circle, soaring over the Atlantic:
A cyclone of white and black feathers
capturing bands of streaming colour
pressed in a curséd opal—
green and pink and turquoise—
set in a jet-black adornment
on a spell-bound chain
entwined round my throat.



Andreas Gripp

Renée M. Sgroi

the rooms you leave behind

aren't empty

they inhabit
the senses in your skin,
your eyes

their chambers

play their own rough music,
your ears
forgetting not to listen

Farewell Sonnet

it is only summer in whose arms
the heart is calm, who knows
the melody we sing. she is our
sister, we, her friend
and when she goes, she packs
her bags with such precision
leaving nothing, not a
strand nor speck of dust,
she is finite in her cleansing.
her sandalwood won't linger
in the sand collected, seashells
or rocks. only texture, this longing
as a grain of pointed stillness,
frost's sharp bitterness

In the last thirty-seven days

of all things you wanted
to shop

at the local big box mart
as fast as you could rush
up and down aisles
throwing socks and cards
and candles in your cart

all the small items you thought
you'd need: candles
for prayers, cards to write your
thank-yous, woolen socks
for your feet were always
blocks of ice

we humoured your request
to shop, the last
thirty-seven days

of your world, who knows

if that spree is useful to you now

Katherine L. Gordon

Dark-eyed Day

This rain will put out
the fire meant to make my ashes.
Nothing remains of me
except the fog of nostalgia,
clinging to remnants of past purpose,
washed away in winding sheets
of clouds occluding light,
leaving me alone in the dark
while thunder tympanis
my dissolution.

Otherworld Faces

Faces from the otherworld peer
across that warped divide
between life and death consciousness,
not quite human, filtered by leaf-shine
and shifting sun, the features are larger,
bonier, eye-huge as though surprised I see them.
Often hooded, I cannot tell their age or era,
time no longer a constant for them.
I see them in the garden where earth-energy soars,
the aura of roses captures.
One stared at me from the sky
when moon was over-full and radiant planets circled her.
Where is their garden?
I picture it, unready to investigate,
content to decipher their messages
before I follow.

John Tyndall

The King of Coif

—for Mitchell Lee

When pandemic
prohibitions relaxed
and salons reopened
my usual barber
Rick, you've got
to help me
announced retirement
aged seventy-five
I turned
to an *artiste*
the king of coif
with his tattoos
Doc Martens
ear-lobe plugs
Mitch and I
both masked
he wielded
electric clippers
in a frenzy
of flying hair
like some cat-
and-dog fight
in a looney cartoon
and soon transformed
1970 shagginess
into 2020 shorn

all but my beard
a hands-off zone
by provincial decree
when he said

Come with me

out of the shop
around the corner
down an alley
up against a wall
for a whisker razing
like I was buying
sex or drugs
or both

When later I gazed
at my mirrored face
the remaining beard
was short as my father's
military moustache
and my lips
looked exactly
like his

Rituximab

My haematologist
she recommends a course
of the drug Rituximab
to reduce high levels
of the monoclonal proteins
that attack my nerves
but my neurologist
he reminds me this
is no cure, present
damage being irreversible
so is she the Queen Mab
who plays tricks on sleepers

She proposes a regimen
of eight dosages
one a month
produces a print-out
of possible side-effects
such as damage
to kidneys or the heart
but I am willing ready
for this therapy
and say Yes

I take a prescribed
cocktail of Prednisone
Ranitidine and Montelukast

the day before, the day of
and the day after
I enter the chilled
chemotherapy unit
where nurses wrap me
in warm blankets
prepare my arm
for intravenous drip
dispense Diphenhydramine
with Acetaminophen
prior to the infusion
and while the treatment proceeds
I pass time between phases
trying to read poetry

For all the hours it takes
I count myself lucky
to receive immunotherapy
to stave off cancer
while others around me
undergo chemotherapy
for late-stage tumours
a woman whose condition
warrants masks and gowns
a man who moans
beseeching *Al-lah Al-lah*

After the initial regime
of Rituximab concludes
with a sore knee-joint
the only side-effect
and reduced proteins
revealed by blood tests
the clinic schedules
eight follow-up doses
spread over two years
and I am primed to play
more turns at this game

When I hear the news
that the drug's delivery
has changed to sub-
cutaneous injection
taking five minutes
with only the preliminary
Benadryl and Tylenol
I am convinced
that my haematologist
she is the Queen Mab
who inspires beautiful dreams
and I cannot wait
to walk the way home

Mark Hertzberger

Homestead

Her barn taken long ago by tornado,
the house mourns
and follows slowly, gracefully.
She has no choice,
but to proceed with dignity.

For who can shrug off the sun's insistence,
or hide from the creeping melt of snow?
What is to be gained
by arguing with the bullying wind?

Fifteen children born under this roof,
eleven raised,
fanning out their descendants
beyond these fields,
a page turned as each walked away.

Now, turkey vultures nest in the bedrooms above,
and tales are told of someone watching
from the windows below.
I wonder who it might be.

I trust they have chosen to stay,
to let the shadows of decades
pass over them,
cool in the depth of memory,
safe from the miasma of a feverish world,
sheltered from the glare of heaven.



Mark Hertzberger

I.B. Iskov

Before The Flood

Once, when the earth was young
and Eden just a garden,
the names of clouds were only a sigh.

Once, when the smallest shiver
wafted through autumn,
a fashion statement resonated in basic green.

Once, when no shame and life
were contained in a breath,
each moment ignited in a glimpse
between mouths full of fruit.

Once, while everything still
was fresh and naïve,
the twilight brimmed a rainbow
of benevolence and gold.

Once, when my man was just a boy
and terror a horror movie,
each peace protest from a flower child
sang a new era.

Once, when buildings were giants among men
and the telephone a dynamic lifeline,
gentle shadows hushed a tableau of fury
between flightless flora and fauna.

Once, when beasts were confined to zoo cages
and communism the perfect enemy,
rain-soaked and dramatic
iron, fear curtained a newborn question.

Once, when snakes could walk the earth
and apples promised wisdom in a bite,
the air harnessed a rhapsody of fire.

Rumour Has It

I pour over the print,
digest the news,
though in these terrorist days
every good story proves volatile.

Rumour has it I work
on the median behind the traffic sign,
buried under history books
with compatible companions
sticking to their cell phones.
We discover the repetition
at our feet—Hitler and the ISIS
with equal disgust.

Moving from the grey matter
of fact to a bomb shelter
on the lakefront covered with black cloth
would keep me from staying home,
but this is no dry run.
I return at moonrise
and wash up on a sheltered beach.

My collaborators believe I hold the pencil
like a knife,
but they only whisper the reality:

any woman struggling on her knees
is never at a loss for words
and should be held responsible
for the gossip.

It is my custom to venture out
in the wilderness,
set myself on a mad course to organize
nouns and verbs and egg shells;
maybe even broken glass.

But I don't fantasize a happy solution.
Jews, and dogs and good Christian children
are all susceptible to the same fate.
Brute creation demands this.
Ask any executioner holding a gun.

Roosevelt Jones

Breath of George Floyd

Anthem played I knelt
on grass It's wrong
they said Ain't got no
gratitude Show some
respect the Flag
Stripes & Stars &
Church & State &
Guns & Guns Honor them
Tear gas Kneel? Not
American
You're on my head
My brother
gunned Down He didn't
do what you say He did
Get off my neck Breathe
I can't
Starry Stripes Police blow
kisses at white militia
on steps OK with AKs Patriots
We're thugs
Now Breathe

Kit Desbarats

Geometric Vision

We sat
on Time's circumference,
watched the parading
of the dead
and awaited the metamorphosis
expected from the fables
learned in childhood—
the angelic, the pit
below their wings, samsara
and karmic change,
the deserved, undeserved,
the injustice and justice
of it all
as though we could simply
watch and cheer, jeer
from some distant
bleacher, untouched
by every fatalistic
birth.

Carol Casey

What Can Happen If You've Unintentionally Given Birth to a Poet

I remember how I clung to him,
little scrap of continuity,
held him tight as I argued with the priest
before the funeral service,
till he capitulated, only stipulated
would I please put the baby down
to deliver your elegy,
the one I insisted on imposing
on the impersonal rite,
could not bear the thought
of you going without words.

Your great-grandson. My anchor,
the words, my steppingstones
to stand upon and wave goodbye,
light the flames on the pyre
of a fierce warrior, drifting away
my goddess, my all,
my sometimes nemesis.

*When I think of my mother
I think in primary colours ...*

Maybe you
would have preferred
generic ceremony, impersonal words.
You were too stalwart
to flaunt tradition.

Maybe once again,
for this one last time
I embarrassed you.

Did you understand
that it was always about love
breaking out,
breaking up, breaking down
for you?

I can still feel the warmth
of that little body
I held so close.

Anna Yin

Ask

—*to Qu Yuan*

In no time summer solstice has arrived;
in a trance the Dragon Boat Festival follows.
My heart is wrapped by leaves of reeds,
unfolding then closing—
bittersweet and salt-sweat,
mixed flavors spread and spin.

Neither the rolling Yellow River
nor the green Miluo River appears;
in my dream, the craving and craved shadow
accompanies me all the way till dawn.

On my window, raindrops keep tapping;
whispers from winds heard far and near—
I ask how many verses could
survive erasure and sing eternally,
and how high waves could rise
after another drowning ...

I see Wuchang fish fly
in the reflection of April willows,
tails white as snow
flashing like knives.



Andreas Gripp

April Bulmer

Morning

You died as I slept.
But across the river
trees grouped in families
heaved and gasped
for breath.

I dreamed of you
and made a wish:
that the shape of
your spirit be
a thin net.
And a good
high wind
pull you up
and away. Above
the water and fish.

Gardens

Mother carries plants. I bear water in a big white jug. We are right of mind and so wait for the sun and for the movement of each hand. We are not shadows on the land, as I once wrote. We are well now: the flowers do not speak of fullness or slugs.

God has brought us violet, hosta, periwinkle and mint. We dig a place for them and so we are changed.

Across the river my father hardens in his new grave. He is not a root or blossom, but the earth has made space for him and so we have whispered his proper name.

Nature

Spring came early and we
enjoyed the water and the birds.
We did not speak. We did not hold
each other in the wet mornings,
but I knew you would return—
as the sun turns to the same sky
and warms. I do love you
though I do not whisper the words.
Why say so when the ground
has opened her loins
and the rain has softened her.

Wake

The lake was bloody, but the body of a horse was the fairest colour. And it was comely in the red waters, as though stuffed with rags. I wanted to hire mourners with their pipes: their melancholy ditties. Pity, for the water was not sweet or very agreeable for drinking and the horse was too bloated and heavy to drag.

David Stones

Nails

There are the nails
that bind our houses
with their iron thread

that sew us together
with their rusty rivers of trust
behind our steel grey walls.

And there are the nails
of the rail yards

the coolies' spikes
that divide and join
with the vast disinterest
of clouds
soundlessly drifting
over meadows
before the prisms
of our indecision.

My mother's knitting needles
were likewise a form of nails

flashing with a metallic insolence
that could
within themselves

register within me
such a confused and fierce love
and yet a certain bleeding.

And later of course
there are the caskets
where the nails are so final

solid hammered endings
driven home
like rivets
to still our longing.

And I suppose
there are also the classic nails of rain
and the nails we pound with our fists
and the nails we insert into parcel bombs
and the nails we pass through wrists.

As a poet
I was not sent here to be lovely
perhaps my role is just to proclaim

and maybe it's true
that poems are just nails sometimes
we drive through truth to expose the stain.

Frank

The dead mouse lay in the slipper
with the sudsy peace of a prince
luxuriating in a warm bath,

one frail antenna of a leg
flopped over the furry rim
as though he just couldn't muster

that one final heroic thrust to draw
the whole self into his woolly casket
before the siren call of his mortal coil.

A nibbled bait trap suggested
one last hors d'oeuvres, one last snort
from the cocaine buffet had done its job.

That sheep-lined hammock of slipper
must have fluttered like a mirage
before the pinky pin holes of his mousy eyes,

the perfect spot to just lie down
and let the leaking happen,
the way it must be for trappers

when the cold takes over
and they prop against a tree,
wondering why the dreaming won't stop.

Well, it wasn't like that for Frank.
My friend died lined up in a bank over on Finch,
waiting to pay a hydro bill,

his head hitting a table on the way down,
no one to catch him,
free fall into a pool of his own piss.

I wish I'd been there for him
but I know life's not like that.
You can't always save the sparrow,

seldom can you catch the falling.
But it would have been wonderful,
somehow right and proper for the world

if I could have just held his head
for a moment, told him how much
he was loved, how much he mattered.

I would have held him, just like that,
maybe offered him one of my slippers,
saying just climb inside, Frank,

everything's going to be okay, pal,
just climb inside and watch the stars,
everything is going to be just fine.



Andreas Gripp

James Deahl

In the Wet Fields

Almost midnight, almost midsummer,
I am passing Burlington in the rain.
South of the cornfields
lightning strikes again and again
but to the north the empty sky
travels forever.

The deaths accumulate.
So many friends reside in paradise
or have turned to nothing under the ground.
The storm moves off and I don't know
if I should pray in these wet fields
or follow the lightning
as far as it goes.

Confronting the Idea of the Good on a Rainy Night in Early May

We should have known
during those dark years of Vietnam
America's democracy had ended,
that all our used-up ghosts
were leaving the vacant mills along the Mon.
Tonight, freight cars lurch
where a rail line used to run;
the old marsh returns
making a place a heron might walk
if only in dream.

The rains won't relent.
I will see my parents' graves
and the home where they raised me
never again.
And they were good Presbyterians.
They voted Republican
every other November,
never once failed to keep the Sabbath,
tried to make me into the man
I should have been.

What can we do with the rain?
Looking back half a century
I still can't tell
what I could have done.

Despite this cold Canadian spring
our mulberry finds the strength
to put forth fresh leaves, our lilac prepares
to bloom. I know
beauty to be good; my wife, a good woman.
Across the river: the dead nation of my birth.

Freezing Rain In The Plague Year

December enters with freezing rain,
every filigree of the cedar
bejewelled in winter's rising sun.
The clean, clear beauty of a new day
is undercut by the virus turning
villages into graveyards where
every neighbourhood knows its widow
and its churches are closed. And still our squirrels
play once the ice starts to melt, blue jays
shriek from high branches as though death were
distant, as if our world were normal.

There lives a purity in the day
stripped clean by cold, by the north wind's teeth
leaving a skeleton of desire,
a longing burned deep in the heart.
Perhaps a sterner spirit brought judgment
to our land, some Norse God rising from
the Saguenay, a force of earlier
times. The jays will not tell us, nor will
these crows calling from their tree tops
like a Muezzin from his sacred tower.
We hope winter's sleep will keep us warm.

The Road North

le soledad, la lluvia, los caminos . . .

—César Vallejo

In winter all roads lead north.
They never return; they end
with the solitude of the boreal forest,
if they manage to reach that far
through timeless rock and muskeg.
Beyond lies only the Canadian Arctic
and tundra: a realm roads cannot find.
Here the implacable spirits
of the North are sovereign.

Winter is a lonely road we all travel.
Far in the north the open grave waits
cut into frozen earth, into land's stern heart,
and a prayer for spring, for resurrection.
This is our land of unlikeness.
Some say light was trapped in the stone
when Earth was formed, an era
of darkness eons before man.
This light calls to us even now.

Note: The César Vallejo quote is from his poem “Piedra Negra sobre una Piedra Blanca”. See: Eshleman, Clayton, ed. and trans., *Poemas Humanos/ Human Poems*. New York: Grove Press, 1969. Print. Original Spanish text: *Poemas Humanos*. Paris: Les Éditions des Presses Modernes au Palais-Royal, 1939. Print. In English: *the loneliness, the rain, the roads . . .*

Andreas Gripp

Before You Die

Before You Die, it seems,
has been springing up in bookstores
all over the place.

“1001 Movies to See Before You Die” —
double-faced in Performing Arts.

“1001 *Places* to See Before You Die” —
yields a tepid trudge to Travel.

And every genre, it seems, has its own
Arabian Nights-inspired thing to do
before the hooded hangman calls:

“1001 Foods to Eat *Before You Die*”
“1001 Albums to Hear *Before You Die*”
“1001 Books to Read
Before You Fucking Die.”

It's worth noting
that with all this talk of death,
the titles continue to fly
and booksellers can scarcely keep up.
Maybe that's due to the fact
that you're never, ever told
exactly *how* you'll die,
for it's unlikely you'll see:

"1001 Dances to Learn
Before You Develop Cancer" or
"1001 Liqueurs to Drink
Before You Get Hit by a Train" OR
"1001 Puzzles to Solve
Before You Get Shot in the Head."

Perhaps we prefer that Death
keep its *own* swell of incense,
its *own* black curtain, its *own* cryptic crossword,
one not deciphered
by reader or writer alike.

But why that extra *one* after *one thousand*?
That little bonus, as a P.S. or encore—
to make amends
for the penultimate trip or film?
Where you're much too anxious
about your impending expiry
to *enjoy* that stroll in Oahu ...
too *perturbed* about your nearing demise
to *laugh* through *A Day at the Races* ...

and only Banks' *allusion*
to *The Sweet Hereafter*
will make that final book
even tolerable.

Paris

This one is not so Grand
as its river, no Seine
cutting at its heart
or couples arm-in-arm
amid *je t'aime*.

We can see
the eroding townscape
from this crowded
rooftop bistro,
and there's a soufflé
on the menu you'd like to try,
while I scan the varied wine list
for *Château Valfontaine*.

We made a *hard*, last-minute
left off the 403, figured
Brantford would be dull,
there's only so much
Bell and Gretzky
we can digest, yet again.

And substituting for a tower?
There's the truss bridge
serving the railway
that traverses the muddy banks,

its lattice now a respite
for a dozen, migrating flocks,

and, upon which, the locals say,
some have confessed their love;
plunged down in *ultime liberté*.

Fabric Carnations, or My Dog was a Vegetarian

The flowers in my house are a fraud,
marigolds that never wither,
forsythia forever fake
with vibrant yellow that doesn't fade,
daisies dotted about
as if I had an eternal supply,
the faint of sight and squinters
never guessing the awful truth,
nor those who call, congested,
unaware they're counterfeit.

For years, *before* I built what's bogus,
this simulated sham of silk,
every bluebell, phlox and lily
were rich in wondrous *redolence*,

concealing the smell of "Spot" —
my shaggy, shedding dog
with neither blotch nor original name,

who'd eat the roses when in season,
plucking petals when backs were turned.

The dog was mine for a decade,
had a couch he claimed as his own,

an old stuffed cat with which he played
but never thought to bite or chew.

When he died,
I was told to go back
to blooms, genuine,
the ones that I'd discarded
after "Spot" had overate,

rid the rooms of imitations,
inhale the fragrant scent of life.

It's *all* a fabrication I replied:
aromas from the freshly
cut, telling the world
they're bleeding,
their beauty-in-a-vase, embalming;

that flowers too love living
as much as a man or departed pet,

that my *forgeries* are better,
no perfumes to pronounce what's dead.

The Fall

I sigh at the sight
of the moth I find so lifeless
in the garden,
rarely noting
its beating white
in the days or weeks gone past,

and my friend who'd passed away,
from a toxic mix, concocted,
said the reason why
he longed for death
was to grasp the love
he'd missed while still a-breath,

that after you have died,
others speak well of you,
spill eulogies of praise,
cry that you'll be missed,
say your poems were *beautiful*,
your paintings, *works of art*,

that all the things you'd ever done
are now *immortalized*,
once ignored, *beatified*,

that he didn't want to take his life
because he loathed the sun,
its warmth upon his face
or the birdsong of the dawn,

but in the *hope*
he'd somehow feel
the intangible touch
of love,

its too-little, too-late
arrival,
its better-than-never embrace,

its invisible kiss that's heard
when someone sobs
at the foot of your grave.



Andreas Gripp

Watchful

—after a statue by Walter Allward

In the hours after dusk,
we deduce he plots the *path*
of distant suns, waits
longer than for Godot
for Antares to explode,
its cradled remnants
to feed five fetal stars,

or stares expectantly
at the halved or crescent moon,
hoping to behold
a *crater's* new creation,
amid the burst
of meteor impact.

At the pinnacle of noon,
we can't surmise the subject
of his gaze, always skyward, note
the sun should bring his eyes
to squint and narrow, fancy
if he's witnessed
every shape and sort of creature
in the clouds,

wonder if he's worried
about *the big one*,
the asteroid that's due
to smite the Earth, if the flesh
of what he emulates
follows the fate
of dinosaurs,

praying that some *God*
will part his lips
if he should spot it,
beseech us both to kiss
then run for cover.

Jennifer Wenn

Notre-Dame Is Burning

Notre-Dame is burning,
so the news says. Here,
a radiant blue dazzles from above,
crisp, chill midday air cradling the
promise of vernal renewal;
an ocean away acrid, fallow plumes
churn skyward, first flickers of flaming
roof animating the early evening.

Notre-Dame is burning.
My adolescent avatar was there
thirty-seven years ago, passed through
the overpowering Gothic façade
from bustling streets and glaring sun to
hallowed hush and glimmering
devotional candles,
gawped at the great rose windows
iridescent the morning light,
trooped with the other ogling tourists
around the adamantine immensity.

Notre-Dame is burning,
the breathless reports
and looping videos
flash around the world,

a modest miracle of timing
in the fallow between
Palm Sunday and Maundy Thursday.

Notre-Dame is burning
and already the question: how?
and already the speculation:
renovations gone disastrously awry,
some electrical fault, or maybe
a carelessly flung cigarette butt.

Notre-Dame is burning.
Conceived in 1160, two hundred years
in gestation, a monumental
gesture of hope and faith,
awesome architectural heirloom,
witness to a vast historical pageant,
gazing impassively through the centuries
on the wealthy few and
the innumerable misérables,
time's shifting tides accreting onto
the spiritual symbol many other meanings.

Notre-Dame is burning
overhead while first responders,

priests and specialists rush to remove
and pack and desperately pass
glorious art and priceless artefacts
down a human chain and out to safety.

Notre-Dame is burning,
great jets of triumphant fire
streaking heavenward
split the gathering dark,
grotesque smoky billows
metastasize from white to orange
to yellow to green to glowering black
under the horrified stares
of a growing flock praying,
singing, filming, despairing,
hoping, stunned at the sight
of their pride and joy,
an ecclesiastical masterpiece become
heart of a secular nation,
being ripped out and incinerated.

Notre-Dame is burning,
the nineteenth century spire
become soaring torch, then
plummeting into the raging inferno
engulfing the timber-forested crown.

Notre-Dame is burning,
survivor of endless religious conflicts,
desecration,
revolution,
hundreds of years of neglect,
the agonies of two World Wars,
its shocking dénouement seemingly
suddenly at hand.

Notre-Dame is burning,
and where would Quasimodo be?
I wondered. No doubt guarding the
precious bells, haunting the hundreds
of firefighters pouring on water from
far below and making a stand
in the twin towers,
defying destruction's fiery grasp.

Notre-Dame is burning,
but the conflagration is fading,
the inestimable roof beams logged
from trees long-gone from France
now a pile of ash, yet the
life's work of uncounted medieval
stonemasons still standing strong,
their shades shoulder-to-shoulder
with those wielding the hoses.

Notre-Dame is burning,
gently, but searching lights reveal
the wondrous stained glass
still intact as well,
the famous organ wounded
but a survivor too,
those candles flickering on.

Notre-Dame was burning,
but will, it is vowed,
be gloriously renaissant,
fortunes formerly withheld
suddenly free to re-form
and reimagine the individual,
collective and digital memory,
meld modern with Middle Ages,
defying time and history's edict
that all things must pass.

Notre-Dame was burning,
but now is calling for me to return,
this time not to pay homage
to a frozen monument,
but to bask in a living metamorphosis,
to feel it all happen again,

twenty-first century craftsmen imbued
with the spirits of their distant ancestors,
mortality breaking bonds and
striving upwards to touch
immortality.

Gregory Wm. Gunn

One Vision of Love

All that's required
is one. One eye
allowing input
to make me
favourably come
in contact with
others as they
see fit.

One eye to see
through layers
of dreamland.
One individual,
one visual orb,
one lifecycle.
One moment steadily
edging forward;
two would act as
night watchmen for
this solitary one.

So, if one is removed,
let it focus on
the pierced point
of entry, the thorny
image of a startled bird
rising from the field.

Being upon the one-
eyed expression,
here in the thinking hub—
precious gem of
a lake and hemoglobin—
sunny substantial ovum,
camera of cameras.

O how privileged
was I to have known
your being here
if only for a short-
lived moment in time!



Andreas Gripp

CONTRIBUTORS

April Bulmer has had ten books of poetry published and was shortlisted for the Pat Lowther Memorial Award for the best book of poetry by a Canadian woman. Her most recent book of poetry is *Out of Darkness, Light* (Hidden Brook Press, 2018). She holds three Masters Degrees in creative writing, religious studies and theological studies. April was born and raised in Toronto, but has lived in Cambridge, Ontario for over 20 years. Contact her at april.poet@bell.net

Carol Casey lives in Blyth, Ontario. Her work has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and has appeared in *The Prairie Journal*, *The Anti-Languorous Project*, *Please See Me*, *Front Porch Review*, *Cypress*, *Vita Brevis*, and in a number of anthologies including *i am what becomes of broken branch* and *We Are One: Poems From the Pandemic*.

Carrie Lee Connel lives in Stratford, Ontario, with her husband and two cats. She has a Masters of Library and Information Science and a BA in English Language and Literature from Western University. Her writing has been published in *Synaeresis*, *The Toronto Quarterly*, *Fterota Logia 1*, *Tales From the Realm Volume One* (Aphotic Realm), *Smitten*, *NOPE Horror Quarterly* (TL;DR Press), *Piping at the End of Days* (Valley Press), and *Moonshine: A Canadian Poetry Collection* (Craigleigh Press). She's the author of three published books of poetry including her newest, *Written In Situ* (Beliveau Books, 2020).

James Deahl currently resides in Sarnia, Ontario. Born in Pittsburgh in 1945, he made his home in Canada in 1970. He's the author of 30 literary titles, the most recent being *Travelling the Lost Highway* (Guernica Editions, 2019). He recently edited *Tamaracks: Canadian Poetry for the 21st Century*, published by Lummo Press of California, an anthology presenting current Canadian poets and their work to an American audience. Along with his daughter Shona, he is presently translating the work of Québécois poet Émile Nelligan into English.

Kit Desbarats hails from Boston and is currently putting her first manuscript of poetry together. She also studies art, photography, and contemporary theatre during this difficult pandemic era.

Howie Good is the author of two new poetry collections, *The Death Row Shuffle* (Finishing Line Press, 2020) and *The Trouble with Being Born* (Ethel Micro-Press, 2020).

Katherine L. Gordon is a rural Ontario poet, publisher, contest adjudicator, editor, and reviewer, working to promote Canadian poetry around the world. She has many books, chapbooks, anthologies and collaborations with fine contemporaries whose work inspires her. Her poems have been translated and awarded internationally. Among her latest books is *Wing Wishing*, published by Melinda Cochrane.

Andreas Gripp is the editor of *Beliveau Review* as well as its predecessor, *Synaeresis*. His latest books are *Selected Poems 2000-2020* and a collection of photography, *Candelabra*. He lives in Stratford, Ontario, with his wife and two cats. "Be kind when I am gone."

Born in Windsor, Ontario, **Gregory Wm. Gunn's** formative years were spent in a few small towns before settling in London, Ontario in 1970. Since his post-secondary education at Fanshawe College in the early 1980s, he has been carefully honing his skills in creative disciplines; published widely in various literary journals including *The Toronto Quarterly*, *Inscribed Magazine*, *Burning Wood*, *20 X 20 Magazine*, *Blue Lake Review*, *Synaeresis*, *Beliveau Review*, *The Light Ekphrastic*, and others. He has published 13 poetry volumes to date.

Mark Hertzberger is a member of Poetry Stratford and the Huron Poetry Collective. Mark's poems have also appeared in *Writers Undercover: Tenth Anniversary Issue*, published by the Cambridge Writers Collective. He has also been published in the Kitchener Public Library's *Writers Collective*

Anthology: Volume 1 and *The Language of Dew and Sunsets: The Second Anthology of the Huron Poetry Collective*. He was the winner of the 2008 Poetry Stratford Open Mic Contest and has read his poetry on CJCS Radio in Stratford. Mark resides in Stratford, Ontario, with novelist Yvonne Hertzberger.

I.B. (Bunny) Iskov is the Founder of The Ontario Poetry Society. In 2009, Bunny was the recipient of the *R.A.V.E. Award* (Recognizing Arts Vaughan Excellence) in recognition of outstanding contribution to the cultural landscape of the City of Vaughan as Art Educator/Mentor in the Literary Arts discipline. In 2017, Bunny received the Absolutely Fabulous Women Award for women over 40, for her contribution to the literary arts in the Golden Horseshoe. Her poetry has been published in several literary journals and anthologies and she has won a few poetry contest prizes. Her latest collection of poems, *My Coming of Age: The Best of an Ongoing Collection of a Life Expressed in Poetry*, was published in 2017 by HMS Press. Most recently, Bunny has one of her poems published in *Tamaracks: Canadian Poetry for the 21st Century* (Lummox Press, 2018), edited by James Deahl.

Roosevelt Jones is a Toronto-based poet who is presently quarantining himself while writing a play about himself in quarantine. Raptors fan, Leafs sufferer.

Laurinda Lind lives in New York's North Country, near the St. Lawrence River. Her work has appeared in *Blue Earth Review*, *Compose*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Soliloquies*, *Spillway*, and *Synaeresis*; also in the anthologies *Visiting Bob: Poems Inspired by the Life and Work of Bob Dylan* (New Rivers Press), *What I Hear When Not Listening: Best of The Poetry Shack & Fiction, Vol. 1* (Sonic Boom), *Planet in Crisis* (FootHills Publishing), and *AFTERMATH: Explorations of Loss and Grief* (Radix Media). She is a Keats-Shelley Prize winner and a Best of the Net nominee.

Bruce McRae, a Canadian musician currently residing on Salt Spring Island, BC, is a multiple Pushcart nominee with over 1,600 poems published internationally in magazines such as *Poetry*, *Rattle*, and *North American Review*. His books are *The So-Called Sonnets* (Silenced Press), *An Unbecoming Fit Of Frenzy* (Cawing Crow Press), *Like As If* (Pski's Porch), and *Hearsay* (The Poet's Haven).

Kenneth Pobo is the author of twenty-one chapbooks and nine full-length collections. Recent books include *Bend of Quiet* (Blue Light Press), *Loplop in a Red City* (Circling Rivers), *Dindi Expecting Snow* (Duck Lake Books), *Wingbuds* (cyberwit.net) and *Uneven Steven* from Assure Press. Human rights issues, especially as they relate to the LGBTQIA+ community, are also a constant presence in his work. In addition to poetry, he also writes fiction and essays. For the past thirty-plus years he taught at Widener University and retired in 2020.

Renée M. Sgroi recently published her debut poetry collection, *life print, in points* (erbacce-press, 2020). She believes that more attention should be paid to all manner of unravelling and dénouement.

David Stones is a mostly retired marketing and business executive, now taking a deep breath as a poet, performer and spoken word artist. He transformed his first book of poetry, *Infinite Sequels* (Friesen Press, 2013), into a one man show of the same name. Lauded as a "brilliant and beautiful piece of theatre" (London Free Press), Stones performs *Infinite Sequels* throughout Ontario. Stones' poetry appears regularly in print and on-line journals, with more than 40 poems published in 2019 (Harmonia Press, Beret Day Press, Authors Press, Big Pond Rumours Press). He is the winner of the 2018 Brooklin Poetry Society prize and two consecutive 2019 Ontario Poetry Society poetry contests, as well as numerous Judge's Choice awards. His second collection of poetry, *Sfumato*, is forthcoming in 2021.

John Tyndall lives in London, Ontario with his wife, storyteller, Diane Halpin. He worked over four decades at The D.B. Weldon Library at Western University, helping generations of students discover and document information for their academic research. His newest book of poems is *Listen to People* (Hidden Brook Press, 2020) while previous books include *The Fee for Exaltation* (Black Moss, 2007) and *Free Rein* (Black Moss, 2001). His poems have also appeared in many anthologies, such as *Translating Horses: The Line, The Thread, The Underside* (Baseline Press, 2015), edited by Jessica Hiemstra and Gillian Sze, and the journals *The Windsor Review* and *The Fiddlehead*. 2020 marked the fiftieth anniversary of his first meeting with John B. Lee in an introductory class to English Literature at Western.

Jennifer Wenn is a trans-identified writer and speaker from London, Ontario. Her first poetry chapbook, *A Song of Milestones*, has been published by Harmonia Press (an imprint of Beliveau Books). She has also written *From Adversity to Accomplishment*, a family and social history; and published poetry in *Beliveau Review*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Open Minds Quarterly*, *Tuck Magazine*, *Synaeresis*, *Big Pond Rumours*, *the League of Canadian Poets Fresh Voices*, *Wordsfestzine*, *Watch Your Head*, and the anthology *Things That Matter*. She is also the proud parent of two adult children with a day job as a systems analyst. Visit her new website: <https://jenniferwennpoet.wixsite.com/home>

Anna Yin was Mississauga's Inaugural Poet Laureate (2015-2017) and has authored five collections of poetry. Her sixth book, *Mirrors and Windows* (Guernica Editions), will be out in 2021. Among the publications and media presenting her poems and translations: *ARC Poetry Magazine*, *The New York Times*, *China Daily*, *CBC Radio*, and *World Journal*. Anna won the 2005 Ted Plantos Memorial Award, two MARTYs, two scholarships from West Chester University Poetry Conference, three grants from OAC and the 2013 Professional Achievement Award from CPAC. Her website: annapoetry.com

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Confronting the Idea of the Good on a Rainy Night in Early May by James Deahl previously appeared in *Travelling The Lost Highway: poems 2011-2018* (Guernica Editions, 2018). *In the Wet Fields* previously appeared in *Rooms the Wind Makes* (Guernica Editions, 2012).

Before You Die, Paris, Fabric Carnations, The Fall, and Watchful by Andreas Gripp previously appeared in *Selected Poems 2000-2020* (Beliveau Books, 2020).

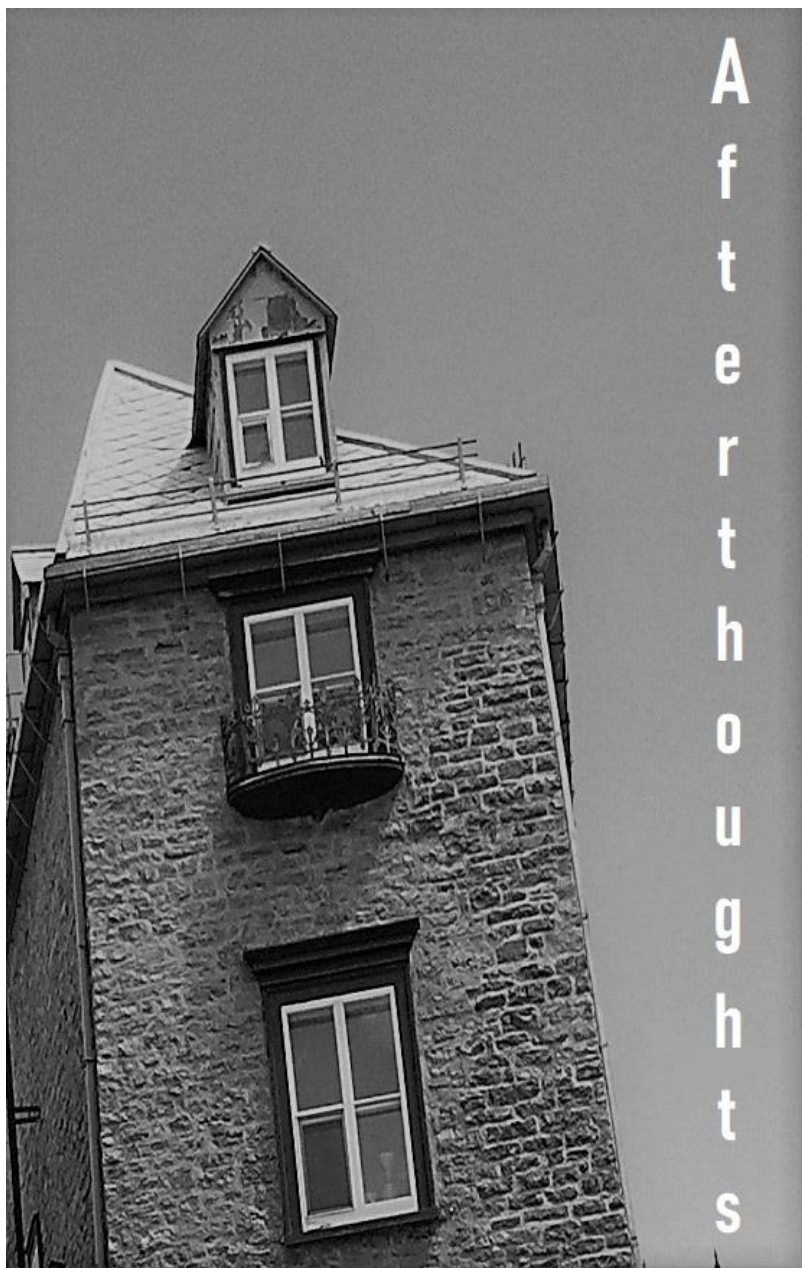
Before the Flood by I.B. Iskov was originally published in the *Voices Israel* 2008 poetry anthology as well as in *Sapphire Seasons* (Aeolus House, 2010).

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